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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PINS](#) [PGOV](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: FM ZEBARI DISCUSSES SYRIA, IRAN, THE PRIME
MINISTER AND THE AMMAN SUMMIT

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Classified By: Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

[¶1.](#) (S) SUMMARY. Foreign Minister Zebari expressed to the Ambassador on November 23 his view that the USG should take a tough stance with GOI ministers to bring about an agreement on national reconciliation. He explained how the restoration of diplomatic ties with Syria was brought about through a tougher stance by the GOI. Zebari expressed concern over what he called Prime Minister Maliki's increasing isolation from other government ministers and reliance on a kitchen cabinet and group of advisors from outside the government.
END SUMMARY.

[¶2.](#) (S) Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari met November 23 with the Ambassador to discuss a range of issues, including recent diplomatic advances with Syria, Iran, the security situation, and the proposed upcoming meeting in Amman between President Bush and PM Maliki.

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Syria
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[¶3.](#) (S) Zebari stressed that his policy toward Syria had paid off. He described his policy as &be tough, keep our distance and show respect,8 and working his interactions through security rather than political channels. He wanted to &show we mean business8 with the Syrians, and the result was the recent visit to Baghdad of senior Syrian officials and the announcement of restoration of diplomatic ties between the two countries. He stressed this represents a major step forward, given the Syrians' previous references to the GOI as an occupation government, and that the restoration of ties is a recognition of the legitimacy of the GOI. Zebari noted that intervention from Algeria was helpful in bringing about the new Syrian policy towards Iraq.

[¶4.](#) (S) Zebari noted the GOI was able to accomplish this through the presentation of a consistent Iraqi message to Syria. He noted that he explained to the Syrians that this was not done at the behest of the US or UK, but was a GOI action. He also noted PM Maliki's direct involvement was critical. He stressed also that Syria is eager to undertake economic cooperation on the oil pipeline, trade, water (on which he felt Turkey has been manipulating both Syria and Iraq) and other issues.

[¶5.](#) (S) Although he expects results from the Syria visit, Zebari also expressed concern that the recent assassination of Lebanese Cabinet Minister Pierre Gemayel could prove

problematic. He noted that the incident indicates that although the Syrians want to present themselves as a unified government, there remain in fact two faces of the GOS.

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Iran
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¶16. (S) Zebari said it was unlikely that the tough strategy that worked with Syria could be quickly used to bring about similar results with Iran. He noted in particular that his own government has yet to come to a unified position on how to deal with Iran. The perception among some Shia that the US was growing soft on Saddamism compounds the problem, he added. The Shia and even some Kurds believe there is a growing policy of Baathist rapprochement which would be reflected at the reconciliation conference. He noted Iran appears to feel it is in a stronger position after the US elections, and may present new ideas on the US presence in Iraq and the Shia situation.

¶17. (S) On a possible triparty meeting with Syria, Iraq and Iran, Zebari has recommended against going forward with the idea. He noted that it would cause concern among Arab neighbors as well as for the US, and would allow Iran to take credit for recent diplomatic progress with Syria.

¶18. (S) He added that Iraq was in an awkward position as chair of the 3rd committee of the UN with a pending resolution against Iran. He said he had instructed his ambassador to abstain from voting or be absent, but in no case cast a vote on the resolution. Iran has displayed concern that the vote is going to be close and needs Iraq's support.

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Amman Meeting
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¶19. (S) Zebari asked the Ambassador about the purpose of the upcoming meeting in Amman, noting that PM Maliki was not planning to bring along high-level GOI ministers. Rather, the PM would travel with his circle of independent political advisors. He hoped the US would intervene to ensure the GOI would be represented, including the FM, and noted that the participants on the USG would be government officials and not independent advisors. In any case, Zebari noted he would be in Amman at the time on other business and thus could easily participate.

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Security Situation
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¶10. (S) Zebari displayed concern over the deteriorating security situation in Iraq. He noted that the GOI is not functioning, and lacks discipline, as was made clear by the recent mass kidnapping of officials from the Ministry of Higher Education. The Prime Minister doesn't know how to manage the government and has failed to hold ministers accountable for such actions.

¶11. (S) He urged a firm stance by the USG with the GOI. He noted the USG role remains instrumental, and that the real crisis in Iraq is the loss of confidence among the political elite in Iraq. Partisan fighting in the COR in particular is a sign of the inability of the GOI to make progress, Zebari noted. The situation will continue to deteriorate, he added, unless there is some new approach by the GOI to confront the perpetrators.

¶12. (S) To break the current political impasse on national reconciliation, Zebari suggested the PM needs to insist on compromise, and not believe Shia parties when they claim they

cannot control the actions of their membership. The US should also engage to keep the Sunni parties engaged in the government.

¶13. (S) The alternative to a lack of progress is that the constitution would be suspended, and the government would be handed over either to a new Bremer or to the UN. The PM, he stressed, has a strong feeling of suspicion that the US is trying to manage the crisis rather than solve it.

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Dealing with the Prime Minister
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¶14. (S) Zebari displayed concern over the PM's increasing political isolation. He believes the PM has surrounded himself with incompetent advisors and an inner circle of ministers drawn on sectarian lines, including Oil Minister Shahrastani, Trade Minister Sudani, and Minister of Education Khuzai.

¶15. (S) Zebari also stressed that the PM would not be willing to bring in new people, and the best approach is to get to know this trusted circle and help them become more effective. He said the PM is increasingly shifting blame for the security situation to the US and Coalition forces. As control is turned over to Iraqi forces, however, this excuse will go away, and the need for professionalism in the PM's office will only increase.

¶16. (S) Zebari added he has decided to postpone his upcoming trip to Saudi Arabia, in light of the fact that VP Cheney will travel there next week.
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